NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 1-0094 FEBRUARY 2, 1976
AL ORTIZ/PANAMA

ARGENTINE GUERRILLA ACTIVITY

ANNCR:

THE ATTACK BY ARGENTINE LEFT WING GUERRILAS AGAINST A POLICE ACADEMY SOUTH OF BUENOS AIRES LAST WEEKEND WAS THE LATEST IN THEIR STEPPED-UP CAMPAIGN. THE INCREASED GUERRILLA ACTIVITY HAS CAUSED ALARM IN THE BUENOS AIRES AREA AND HAS AFFECTED THE COUNTRY'S POLITICAL SITUATION. V-O-A'S ORTIZ SENDS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT.

VOICE:

STATEMENTS BY ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT AND MILITARY OFFICIALS AND GUERRILLA COMMUNIQUES SAY IT IS NOTHING LESS THAN AN ALL-OUT WAR. THE ATTACK BY A GROUP OF ABOUT FIFTY GUERRILLAS AGAINST A POLICE ACADEMY SOUTH OF BUENOS AIRES LAST SUNDAY MORNING HAD ALL THE MAKINGS FOR A MAJOR BATTLE IN THAT WAR. THE GUERRILLAS APPARENTLY INTENDED TO CAPTURE HELICOPTERS AT THE ACADEMY, BUT HUNDREDS OF POLICE CADETS AND ARMY TROOPS REPELLED THE ATTACK KILLING AT LEAST THREE GUERRILLAS.

THE GUERRILLAS DID NOT GET THEIR HELICOPTERS, AND THE TROOPS DID NOT KILL MANY GUERRILLAS -- SO IT WAS NOT A MAJOR SETBACK TO EITHER SIDE, BUT IT PROVED THAT THE GUERRILLAS ARE AGAIN PREPARED TO ATTACK MAJOR POLICE AND MILITARY INSTALLATIONS BARELY ONE MONTH AFTER SUFFERING THEIR BIGGEST DEFEAT AT THE HANDS OF THE ARMY. THAT WAS IN LATE DECEMBER WHEN A FORCE OF MORE THAN ONE HUNDRED GUERRILLAS ATTACKED AN ARMY ARSENAL IN A BUENOS AIRES

SUBURB. ARMY TROOPS, APPARENTLY WARNED AHEAD OF TIME, TRAPPED THE GUERRILLAS KILLING AROUND EIGHTY AND CAPTURING THE REST. IT WAS THE BLOODIEST BATTLE EVER BETWEEN THE GUERRILLAS AND THE ARMY -- BIGGER THAN THE GUERRILLA ATTACK EARLIER LAST YEAR AGAINST MILITARY FACILITIES IN THE NORTHERN PROVINCE OF FORMOSA.

THESE LARGE-SCALE ATTACKS INDICATE THAT THE LEFT WING GUERRILLA GROUPS ARE BIGGER, BETTER EQUIPPED AND BETTER COORDINATED THAN EVER. HOWEVER, THERE ARE SIGNS THAT THE GUERRILLAS ARE NOT AS STRONG AS THEY FIRST APPEARED TO BE. MOST OF THE CASUALTIES AND PRISONERS IN THE DECEMBER ATTACK WERE TENNAGERS -- MANY OF THEM WOMEN -- INSTEAD OF THE SEASONED, OLDER GUERRILLAS WHO WERE CAPTURED IN PAST YEARS. AND THE GUERRILLAS APPEAR TO BE USING MORE HOMEMADE, PRIMITIVE WEAPONS.

IN THE WOODED, MOUNTAINOUS NORTHERN PROVINCES, THE ARMY HAS BEEN CONDUCTING EXTENSIVE ANTI-GUERRILLAS OPERATIONS FOR MONTHS USING HELICOPTER GUNSHIPS AND JET FIGHTER-BOMBERS TO FLUSH OUT THE TERRORISTS. THIS AREA WAS ONCE A GUERRILLA STRONGHOLD WITH GUERRILLAS TRAINING SCHOOLS AND SUPPLY CENTERS. BUT THE ARMY CAMPAIGN HAS TAKEN A HEAVY TOLL AMONG THE GUERRILLAS, AND THE TERRORISTS WHO HAVE BEEN CAPTURED RECENTLY HAVE BEEN UNDERNOURISHED AND ILL-EQUIPPED INDICATING THAT THE ARMY HAS CUT OFF THE GUERRILLAS' SUPPLY LINE IN THAT PART OF THE COUNTRY.

MUCH OF THE GUERRILLA ACTIVITY NOW APPEARS CENTERED IN THE BUENOS AIRES PROVINCE. AND ALTHOUGH THE GUERRILLAS HAVE LAUNCHED LARGE-SCALE ATTACKS, THEY HAVE NOT ABANDONED

THEIR COMMON, SMALL-SCALE OPERATIONS. LAST WEEK THEY KILLED TWO OFFICIALS OF A U.S.-OWNED FACTORY JUST NORTH OF BUENOS AIRES. MANY ARGENTINES ARE WONDERING WHETHER THE TWO MAJOR LEFT WING GUERRILLA GROUPS HAVE JOINED FORCES. ONE OF THE GROUPS, THE MONTNEROS, HAS OPERATED MAINLY IN THE BUENOS AIRES AREA OVER THE PAST YEARS, WHILE THE PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY ARMY ATTACKED TARGETS IN THE WESTERN AND NORTHERN PROVINCES. BUT THE MONTNEROS DENIED ANY INVOLVEMENT IN LAST DECEMBER'S BLOODY BATTLE AT THE BUENOS AIRES ARSENAL. THE TWO GROUPS THAT HAVE ALWAYS MAINTAINED SEPARATE IDENTITIES DO NOT APPEAR TO HAVE MERGED. BUT THE LARGE-SCALE ATTACKS HAVE DEEPLY AFFECTED ARGENTINA'S POLITICAL SCENE. AFTER THE BATTLE IN LATE DECEMBER, LEADERS IN PRESIDENT MARIA ESTELA PERON'S PARTY BLAMED THE INCREASED GUERRILLA ACTIVITY ON THE GOVERNOR OF BUENOS AIRES PROVINCE, WHO WAS EXPELLED FROM THE PARTY LAST YEAR AFTER CRITICIZING MISSUS PERON'S LEADERSHIP. SOME PARTY LEADERS WANT MISSUS PERON TO PLACE THE PROVINCE UNDER FEDERAL CONTROL, THEREBY REMOVING THE GOVERNOR AND STRENGTHENING THE PARTY'S INFLUENCE THERE.

MEANWHILE, RELIGIOUS AND MILITARY LEADERS INDICATED THAT THE RECENT DISCLOSURES OF CORRUPTION IN MISSUS PERON'S GOVERNMENT WERE PARTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR DISILLUSIONING YOUTH WITH POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND TURNING THEM TOWARDS GUERRILLA ACTIVITY. AND THE STEPPED-UP GUERRILLA CAMPAIGN HAS ADDED TENSION TO LIFE IN BUENOS AIRES. HEAVILY-ARMED TROOPS UNDER STATE-OF-SIEGE POWERS PATROL THE STREETS OF

THE CAPITAL STOPPING CITIZENS AT RANDOM TO CHECK THEIR DOCUMENTS. WALKING ALONG A DOWNTOWN STREET IN THE EVENING, YOU CAN SEE CARAVANS OF POLICE CARS WITH THEIR LIGHTS OUT SLOWLY PATROLLING THE STREETS. THE SLIGHTEST PROVOCATION -- A FIRECRACKER OR A STREET FIGHT -- DRAWS CROWDS OF POLICEMEN AND TROOPS ARMED WITH MACHINEGUNS.

THE GUERRILLAS HAVE VOWED TO OVERTHROW MISSUS PERON'S GOVERNMENT. NO ONE EXPECTS THEM TO SUCCEED, BUT THEIR LATEST LARGE-SCALE ATTACKS HAVE AFFECTED LIFE IN ARGENTINA AND HAVE PUT MORE PRESSURE ON MISSUS PERON TO CRUSH THE TERRORISTS.

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